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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN-QATARI RELATIONS START TO THAW IN BUSINESS AND  
POLITICAL ARENAS

Classified by: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Nader Dahabi led a high-level November 8-9 delegation to Qatar which included the Ministers of Labor, Industry and Trade, and Media Affairs. According to press reports, Jordan and Qatar agreed to establish a joint investment fund, with up to \$1 billion from Qatar, and to set up a private sector business council. Qatar also offered to sign a protocol on recruiting Jordanian expatriates and streamlining work visa-related procedures. Jordan Investment Board CEO Dr. Maen Nsour, under instructions from the PM, will travel to Doha on November 17, to review with the Qataris proposals for possible investment in energy, water, tourism, chemical manufacturing, and industry. The goal, he explained is to develop an investment framework in advance of an upcoming trip to Qatar by King Abdullah II, which is expected to occur on November 23-24, with the King staying one night.

¶2. (C) Beyond the economic sphere, Jordan and Qatar are also drawing closer to each other on the political front after many years of frigid relations. During the PM's visit, Jordan announced the appointment of a new ambassador to Qatar, a post that had remained vacant for two years. During this period of mutual distrust, Qatar-based Al-Jazeera conducted an interview with Prince Hassan in which he dwelt on being passed over for the throne by the late King Hussein. That incident angered Jordanian authorities enough to confiscate the tapes from the news crew and resulted in the withdrawal of Jordan's ambassador. Commenting on the interview, Nsour called it a "blip" and said Qatar, as home to Al-Jazeera, was too influential to ignore and argued that improving relations was long overdue.

¶3. (C) Nevertheless, in the eyes of most Jordanians, the Prince Hassan incident was only the most egregious example of Qatari interference in Jordanian internal affairs. By cultivating local Islamists and befriending Hamas, the Qatari government (and Al-Jazeera in particular) has long been seen as undermining Jordan's stability. Yet now those same Islamist ties are being used to repair the relationship. According to National Center for Human Rights Director and former PM Adnan Badran, the thaw in Jordanian-Qatari relations is directly related to ongoing talks between GOJ, Hamas, and the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Despite the assurances of GOJ officials that talks are confined to the security arena, Badran said that ongoing negotiations with domestic and foreign Islamists have eased tensions on the political front as well, allowing Jordan to reach out to the Islamists' main regional patron.

¶4. (SBU) During a November 12 press conference, Minister of State for Media and Communication Affairs Nasser Judah said relations between Jordan and Qatar are now "better than ever before." He also mentioned that both Jordan and Qatar have the same commitment to returning the momentum to the peace process and establishing an

independent Palestinian state on Palestinian national soil - a key point of difference between the two countries in the past.

15. (SBU) Ministry of Labor Secretary General Dr. Gazi Shbaikat confirmed that Jordan and Qatar are in discussions over Jordanian expatriate policies and procedures. Shbaikat agreed that falling oil prices could harm Jordan through both a decline in foreign direct investment in Jordan, as well as a decline in the hiring of Jordanians abroad. He did not think that the number of Jordanian expatriate workers would decline from current levels, estimated at about 400,000 workers, nor did he expect many Jordanians to return, but he was pessimistic about the potential for short-term job growth in the Gulf. He added that Jordan's economy relies increasingly heavily on foreign remittances which exceeded \$3 billion between January and August of this year.

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Beecroft